

What Is Claimed Is:

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1. A method of controlling a telephone call to an instant messaging user, comprising:
 - 5 receiving at a call server a call directed to the user;
 - identifying an instant messaging service used by the user;
 - sending an instant message to the user through the instant messaging service to offer the user one or more options for responding to the call;
 - if no response is received from the user within a predetermined period of
 - 10 time, controlling the call as specified in a default option; and
 - otherwise:
 - receiving an option selection from the user; and
 - controlling the call as specified in said selected option.
- 15 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising determining a user name of the user for the instant messaging service.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein said one or more options include one or more of the set of: transfer the call, answer the call, take a message from
- 20 the caller and play a message for the caller.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein said option selection is received in an instant message from the user.
- 25 5. The method of claim 1, wherein said selected option is presented in said instant message as a hyperlink and said receiving said option selection comprises receiving a communication connection initiated by the user's selection

of said selected option.

5 6. The method of claim 1, wherein said selected option is to play a message for the caller, the method further comprising recording a message from the user.

10 7. The method of claim 1, wherein said selected option is to play a message for the caller and said controlling comprises:
 converting a textual message provided by the user into audio; and
 playing said converted message for the caller.

15 8. The method of claim 1, wherein said selected option is to answer the call and said controlling comprises:
 establishing an audio connection between the user and said call server; and
 bridging the call onto said audio connection.

20 9. The method of claim 8, wherein said audio connection is established through the instant messaging service without further action by the caller.

25 10. The method of claim 8, wherein the user is equipped for only one-way audio and said controlling further comprises:
 executing one of a text-to-speech module and a speech-to-text module to allow communication between the user and the caller in the direction opposite to said one-way.

11. A method of handling a telephone call for a subscriber,

comprising:

receiving at a call server a call for a subscriber;

identifying a first computer-implemented instant messaging system used by the subscriber;

5 sending a first instant message to the subscriber through the instant messaging system, wherein said first instant message includes a first set of options for handling the call and one or more of said first set of call handling options comprise links to said call server;

if the subscriber selects one of said first set of call handling options:

10 receiving a communication connection from the subscriber, wherein said connection is initiated by the subscriber's selection of a call handling option that comprises a link; and handling the call as specified in said selected call handling option.

15 12. The method of claim 11, further comprising:

if the subscriber does not respond to said first instant message within a predetermined period of time, handling the call as specified in a default call handling option.

20 13. The method of claim 11, further comprising:

identifying the user by an original called number field of the call.

14. The method of claim 11, further comprising:

25 identifying the caller by a caller identification field of the call; wherein said first instant message includes an identifier of the caller.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein said links are hyperlinks to said

call server.

16. The method of claim 11, wherein said receiving a call comprises receiving a call forwarded to said call server from a subscriber number originally
5 dialed by the caller.

17. The method of claim 11, further comprising retrieving user names of the subscriber for one or more instant messaging systems.

10 18. The method of claim 11, further comprising sending a second instant message to the subscriber through an instant messaging system different from said first instant messaging system, wherein said second instant message comprises a second set of call handling options.

15 19. The method of claim 18, further comprising:
if the subscriber selects one of said second set of call handling options:
receiving a return instant message from the subscriber, wherein
said return instant message includes an identifier of a call handling option
selected by the subscriber; and
20 handling the call as specified in said selected call handling option.

20. The method of claim 11, wherein said selected call handling option comprises transferring the call and said handling the call comprises:
transferring the call from said call server to a telephone number identified
25 by the subscriber.

21. The method of claim 11, wherein said selected call handling option

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comprises playing a message for the caller and said handling the call comprises:
playing a message identified by the subscriber for the caller.

22. The method of claim 21, further comprising converting said
5 identified message from text to audio prior to said playing.

23. The method of claim 21, further comprising recording said
message prior to said playing.

10 24. The method of claim 11, wherein said selected call handling option
comprises answering the call and said handling the call comprises:
establishing an audio connection between said call server and the
subscriber, without further action on the part of the caller; and
bridging the call onto said audio connection.

15 25. The method of claim 24, wherein said device is not configured for
two-way audio and said establishing an audio connection comprises:
operating one of a text-to-speech module and a speech-to-text module.

20 26. The method of claim 24, wherein said establishing an audio
connection comprises establishing an audio connection between said call server
and a communication device on which the subscriber received said first instant
message.

25 27. The method of claim 11, wherein said selected call handling option
comprises taking a voicemail message from the caller and said handling the call
comprises:

connecting the call to a voice recording module; and
recording a message from the caller.

28. The method of claim 27, wherein the subscriber chooses to screen
5 said voicemail message, the method further comprising
establishing an audio connection between said call server and the
subscriber; and
bridging said audio connection onto said voice recording connection.

10 29. A computer readable storage medium storing instructions that,
when executed by a computer, cause the computer to perform a method of
controlling a telephone call to an instant messaging user, the method comprising:
receiving at a call server a call directed to the user;
identifying an instant messaging service used by the user;
15 sending an instant message to the user through the instant messaging
service to offer the user one or more options for responding to the call;
if no response is received from the user within a predetermined period of
time, controlling the call as specified in a default option; and
otherwise:
20 receiving an option selection from the user; and
controlling the call as specified in said selected option.

30. A call control system for handling calls in real-time, comprising:
a call receiver module configured to receive a call directed to a subscriber;
25 a database of subscriber profiles, wherein a profile for a first subscriber
includes one or more user names of the first subscriber for one or more instant
messaging systems;

an instant messaging module configured to send an initial instant messaging message to the first subscriber in response to receipt of a call for the first subscriber from a caller, wherein said initial instant messaging message includes a set of options for handling the call;

5 a voicemail module configured to record an incoming message from the caller if the first subscriber selects a voicemail option for handling the call; and

a message playback module configured to play an outgoing message for the caller if the first subscriber selects a message playback option for handling the call.

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31. The call control system of claim 30, wherein one or more of said call handling options in said initial instant messaging message comprise hyperlinks to the call control system.

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32. The call control system of claim 31, further comprising a network server configured to receive a communication connection from the first subscriber initiated by the first subscriber's selection of one of said hyperlink call handling options.

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33. The call control system of claim 30, wherein said instant messaging module is further configured to receive a return instant messaging message from the first subscriber, wherein said return instant messaging message includes a selection of one of said call handling options.

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34. The call control system of claim 30, further comprising an audio module configured to establish an audio connection with the first subscriber if the first subscriber selects a call handling option for answering the call.

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35. The call control system of claim 34, wherein said audio module is further configured to establish an audio connection with the first subscriber if the first subscriber selects a voicemail with screening option for handling the call.

36. The call control system of claim 30, wherein said message playback module comprises a text-to-speech converter.